



OMEP-USNC

**Understanding the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child
and
Helping Children Everywhere Understand Their Rights
And That All Children Have These Rights**

**Dorothy Sailor, Professor Emeritus
Fullerton College
Blythe Hinitz, Professor
College of New Jersey**



Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the UN
Convention on the Rights of the Child
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**Understanding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:
Helping Children Everywhere Understand that all Children Have Rights and Responsibilities**

Legislation and Programs to Support Children and their Parents

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Introduction:

This Children's Rights Booklet Is Dedicated to OMEP-USNC's Annual Children's Day, November 20.

The World Organization for the Education of Young Children -United States National Committee's (OMEP-USNC) Children's Day, November 20, was established in 2003 as a way to honor, respect, and support all children. The date was chosen to coincide with the day that the UN ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). November 20 is also Universal Children's Day. The current focus of OMEP-USNC Children's Day is to support and value all children every day by working for their rights as human beings regardless of their ethnicity, creed, physical and emotional abilities, or where they live.

OMEP is the only international organization working for the education of young children at the local and global levels. In 1948, following the devastation of a world war, children's advocates met in Prague and created an organization dedicated to meet the needs of young children.

The CRC, an international human rights treaty, took 40 nations more than 10 years to develop. It provides the framework for basic conditions for healthy growth and development that all children need but too many do not have. These standards are also guidelines for parents, families, communities, private and government agencies, and industries.

Both legislation and implementation of children's human rights are needed. This booklet covers some of these rights and ways to help children and adults understand and support children's rights. Implementation should begin immediately, without waiting for the U.S. to ratify the CRC.

Helping Children Everywhere Understand their Rights and All Children's Rights and Responsibilities

1. Brief History of OMEP-USNC's Children's Day and its Relationship to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and to Universal Children's Day.

The first OMEP-USNC Children's Day was celebrated in 2003. It was designed to help parents and adults in children's lives support, respect, and value children and for children to understand their rights and responsibilities. November 20 was chosen as the special day to coincide with the 1989 signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN.

The 2009 theme for OMEP-USNC Children's Day and for activities throughout the year is to support children by trying to implement the articles or rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child into children's environments. It is also important to inform citizens about the CRC and the need for the U.S. to ratify it.

International Children's Day had its origin in the 1925 World Conference for the Well being of Children in Geneva. The June 1 date had a Chinese-USA origin (nothing to do with Communism). In 1925, the Chinese consul-general in San Francisco gathered a number of Chinese orphans to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival. This coincided with the conference mentioned above and June 1 became Children's Day in the U.S. The observances dwindled over the years and eventually stopped. However, observances in some states were revived a couple of years ago. Today it is often referred to as Universal Children's Day and if celebrated, each nation chooses its own date. There is no consensus among OMEP nations. OMEP-USNC has a campaign to place Universal Children's Day November 20 on all ECE organization calendars and eventual on commercial calendars.

See OMEP-USNC Children's Day Poster on the next page



OMEP-USNC

CHILDREN'S DAY



November 20th

A day to honor all children and to promote a better understanding of their needs and rights as human beings.

The United States Committee of OMEP (World Organization for the Education of Young Children) chose November 20th as Children's Day to coincide with the November 20th, 1989, signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN International Children's Rights Day. OMEP is an international organization working for the education and welfare of all young children locally and internationally. Organized in 1948 in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in response to children's post-war need for play environments, OMEP is the only international non-governmental (NGO) organization working for the education and welfare of children ages 0-8 years old. Currently represented in 70 countries, OMEP has consultative status with UNESCO, UNICEF, the UN Commission for Economic and Social Change, and the Council of Europe. Click here for the **Children's Day Celebration Packet** available in PDF format. (www.omep-usnc.org)

2. The Needs of All Children for Healthy Growth and Development Are Articulated in the CRC and Require Both Legislation and Implementation.

In order to promote a more supportive social and legislative environment for all our children, we need both basic legal rights and the implementation of those rights. Valuing, supporting and protecting all our children should be an integral part of our daily planning.

The CRC states that a child's best interest should be the basis for all decisions affecting them. The four underlying principles of the CRC are Survival, Protection, Development, and Participation.

Survival: The right to life (article.6) It also includes the rights to appropriate health care, safe drinking water, nutritious food, adequate sanitation, healthy environmental conditions, a standard of living that ensures children's physical and emotional needs, and adequate treatment and care for children with disabilities or victims of abuse and neglect (arts. 24, 27, 39).

Protection from: Discrimination, abduction, abuse and neglect, exploitation and trafficking, drugs, armed conflict, child labor, capital punishment, attacks on privacy, family and home, and unlawful arrest, detention, and imprisonment (arts. 2, 22-23, 30, 11, 35, 19, 34-36, 33, 38, 32, 16, 37&40).

Development: The rights to access child and age-appropriate information that enhances overall well-being and facilitates human rights, the right to social assistance programs, such as Head and Healthy Start, Medicaid, SCHIP, TANF, free and compulsory primary education and increased access to secondary and vocational education and an education that assists children in reaching their fullest potential and prepares them for adulthood (arts. 17, 26, 28, & 29).

Participation: Freedom of opinion and expression, of religion, of thought and conscience, and of association and peaceful assembly (arts. 12, 14, &15).

3. Help Children Understand all Children's Rights and Responsibilities through Verbal Support and Activities.

Helping children understand their rights and that all children have these rights is consistent with the principles of multicultural education. Children's rights and responsibilities are influenced by their developmental level.

**Working with children's rights is a process and not a project.
It is continuous and not a theme for a week.**

To help infants and toddlers be aware of their rights, adults must show respect for their individuality by adjusting their pace to children's exploration of the environment, finding safe space where they can be alone when needed, and providing the toys and materials suited for their varying abilities and interests. Toddlers are ready for choices, so give them a choice between two acceptable actions. Preschool children learn through their interactions with others, materials, and the environment. There are many opportunities to incorporate rights education into the program.

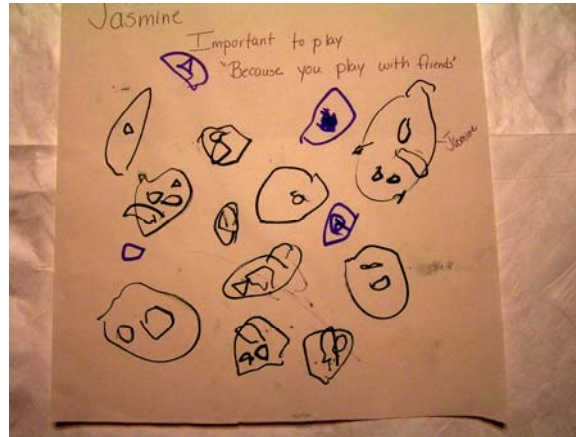
Young school age children are concerned with issues of equity, fairness, justice and what is right. Since schools play a significant role in applying rights, teachers should be aware of the CRC rights for all children and corresponding responsibilities.

Adults can incorporate the language of rights into daily activities, focus on the uniqueness of each child, the recognition and expression of feelings and the importance of listening skills, decision making capacity, problem solving abilities, and developing respect for all.

The following activities could be used to emphasize rights or articles such as, the *right to play*, the *right to express your opinions*, or the *right to a name*.

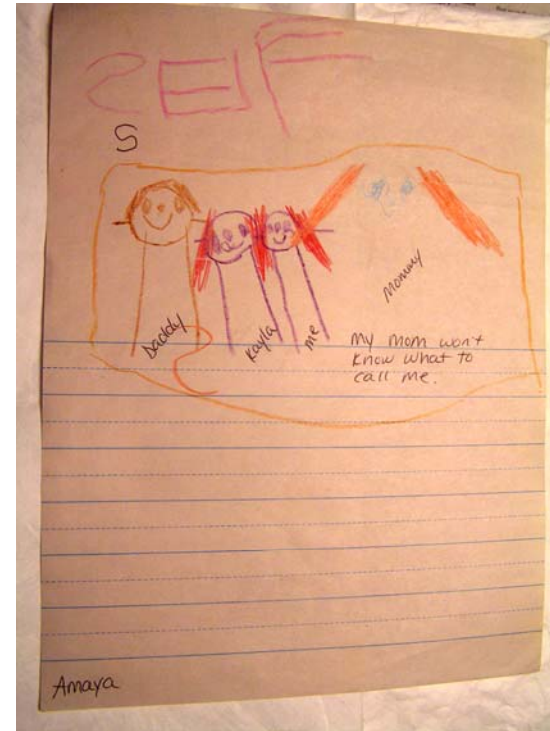
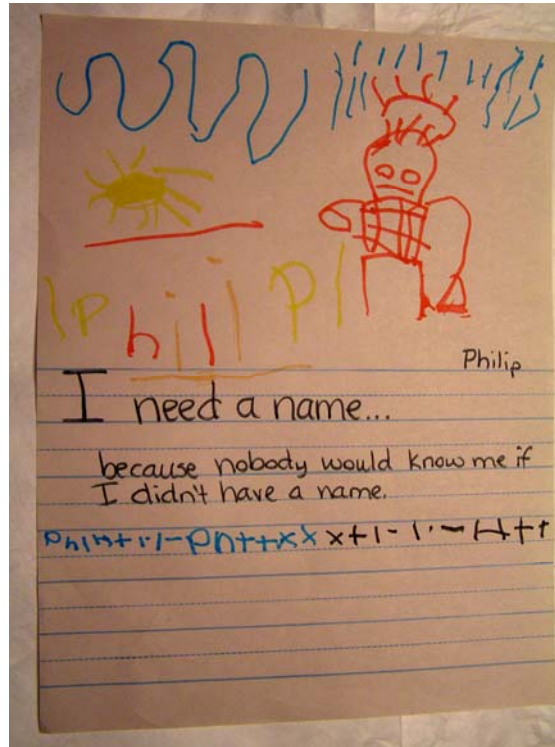
Children are 7 to 8 years old and in second grade.

The Right to Play- Article 31



Children are 7 to 8 years old and in second grade

The Right to a Name- Your Name- Article 8



Children can make their own drawing or coloring book using blank sheets of paper. Using different sizes, shapes or kinds of paper stimulates creativity.

The teacher or child can print on the paper the right or idea that the child wants to express.

The teacher could also let children choose from different media. For example, younger children, could make a collage representing their ideas and feelings from pictures on the table.

When children are given the freedom to choose materials and express themselves, it encourages expression of their feelings, ideas and creativity. Children can do this at their level and interests.

The teacher could tell a story using some of the children's pictures and then ask the children what else the picture could tell them.

For the *Right to a Home*- your own place to live, discuss how children live in different types of homes and some children do not have a home, but may temporarily live in a car, a park, or a shelter (explain at their level or omit). Children could cut out or find different kinds of homes.

Flannel boards with different shapes, or figures of children, houses, trees, etc. could be available.

For the *Right to Play*, or your own free time, the teacher could take photos of the children playing. Children could choose one or more of the prints and place them on a bulletin board or a mural.

For the *Right to be Free from Harm*, the teacher needs to provide a safe environment and help children learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, without verbal or physical abuse. When children are fighting, the teacher can say to a child, "Johnny has a right not to be hit and so do you. How else can you tell him that you are angry about . . . ?" Or, "You need to use your words." Also encourage children to talk about their fears. Props such as puppets, telephones, tape recorders help.

A group of young children was asked by their teachers, "What is violence?"

A four-year old says, "Its guns and blood."

Another chimes in, "It's gangs and police."

Still another , "It's knives."

A soft spoken child whispers, "It's getting dead." (Parry, 1993).

For the *Right to Live Without Fear*, discuss bullies and victims and what teachers, children, and everyone can do to reduce or prevent these situations. To be effective, parents most also be involved in these programs along with the whole school. Preventive programs are especially successful when preschooler or kindergarten children learn to accept each other and feel good about themselves.

Many human rights can be taught through play activities and games. See Children's Activity Packets on www.OMEP-USNC.org.

For illustrations of many of these *rights*, see the book, *A Right World: Helping Kids Understand the Convention of the Rights of the Child* by Tamara Awad Lobe, www.nyap.org.

4. What Is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Its Impact on Child Well-being?

The UN CRC is an international human rights treaty for all children passed unanimously on November 20, 1989 by the UN General Assembly after 40 nations spent 10 years drafting it. The CRC document was created to ensure that children around the world will grow and develop to their fullest potential. Each child is an individual with human rights and responsibilities appropriate for her or his age and development. The document places emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family and states that governments should support the family. With its 54 articles, the fundamental goal is to protect children when they are most vulnerable in their early years of life.

The CRC articulates what governments and individuals should do to promote and protect the human rights of all children and not just the privileged few. Each article focuses on a particular right for all children, such as the right for adequate food, a name and a home, preventive and primary health care, education, a culture and a country. It doesn't matter what color you are, what size or what language you speak or even your religion.

The CRC has been ratified by 193 nations that have made it their law. Only the U.S. and Somalia have failed to do so. Ratification of the CRC means that governments commit themselves to ensuring that children grow up in safe and supportive conditions, with access to high quality education and health care, and a good standard of living. It means governments agree to protect children from discrimination, sexual and commercial exploitation and violence, and to take particular care of orphans and young refugees. However, rights only become effective when they are implemented. Nations that have ratified the CRC are in various stages of putting it into practice.

Extensive research on the CRC's impact on a child well-being comes from the study of 62 countries in Europe and Central Asia. In general, ratification of the CRC has led to the establishment of National Independent Institutions for the Protection of Children's Rights, making children more visible to Government and ensuring respect for children's rights across Government at all levels as opposed to the current US approach, compartmentalizing children's rights in different departments and also levels of government. For example, at the federal level, the right to education is in the Department of Education and the right to health in the Department of Health and Human Services. In addition, the independence of these new national institutions allows them to identify gaps and shortcomings in child-related activities and in services provided by public agencies as well as address those issues that may not be a government priority. One of the big gaps in the U.S. is between social services for prisoners and social services for their children while a parent is in prison or going to prison.

Specific Examples of Implementation

Australia created the position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs,

to ensure an integrated government approach across Federal programs/policies for children. The

country also implemented a national initiative designed to support parents and families in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Canada established a Secretary of State for Children and launched a National Children's Agenda in order to develop unified territorial and provincial goals that promote and enhance children's well-being.

The Scandinavian nations have achieved 100% literacy.

United Kingdom established a new department, Children and Young People, that focuses on children's needs. They also enacted new legislation requiring both parents to be responsible for their child regardless of marital status

5. Why the U.S. Should Ratify the CRC: Myths and Facts.

Myths

Over the years, small groups in the U.S. have been extremely vocal in opposing the CRC and the UN in general. Their publicity and messages to Senators and the President have been at times overwhelming. These groups have been effective in keeping the CRC from reaching the Senate for a vote. Supporters on the other hand, have sent very little mail to their Senators. In order for this to become U.S. law, the Senate must approve the document with modifications if necessary and send it to the President for signing. Contrary to opponents' claims:

- This treaty does not suggest that children sue their parents, have abortions, join gangs, or do as they please without warrant.**
- It does not dictate how parents should raise their children. The CRC recognizes the family as the natural and best place for children to grow and develop to their fullest. Only a family can**

give children the love, sense of belonging, understanding and support they need. See arts. 3, 5-10, 14, 18, 22, and 27

- **This treaty makes no mention of abortion. The Vatican was one of the first to ratify the CRC.**
- **The United Nations has no authority to tell any nation what to do. Each state must develop and implement its own legislation. The US Constitution, upheld by the US Supreme Court, says no treaty can override the Constitution.**

The U.S. can ratify the CRC with RUDS- reservations, understandings, and declarations. Any nation can nullify its ratification by written notification to the UN Secretary General.

The Convention is monitored by an international committee who reads each nation's five year report. Members of the committee will also work with a government to help them implement an action to support their children, but only that nation can legalize change.

Facts Why the U.S. Should Ratify the CRC:

Although the U.S. has some of the best laws and programs for children, there are many children whose basic needs are not being met. For example, among the industrialized nations, the U. S. has a larger percentage of its children living in poverty, without health insurance, born with low birth weight, and having lower eight grade math scores, than children in most if not all of the industrialized countries. Death by firearms is 12 times higher for U.S. children than in 25 industrialized countries combined. Too many of our children suffer from neglect and abuse, resulting in death for some. (Children's Defense Fund, 2001, 2002, 2003; Sailor, 2004).

Ratifying the CRC would bring domestic benefits. We say that our children are our number one priority, but our actions don't support this. Ratifying this treaty would highlight the needs and rights of children and provide a framework with which to measure our actions. For

example, it should modify our attitudes, raise our awareness, and help prevent the neglect and other abuses of children, and see that all children have access to basic health care.

Along with domestic benefits, ratification of the CRC would allow the U.S. to join the other nations in accepting universal human rights for all children. The U.S. could be part of a global team to monitor the progress of conditions for children, including each nation's five year report (two years for new members). This would also enhance the status of the U.S. as a world leader in human rights.

6. National Movement for U.S. to Ratify the CRC and Opportunities to Help

The Campaign for the U.S. Ratification of the CRC, a grassroots voluntary effort, consists of more than 200 social service agencies, advocacy organizations, faith-based organizations, attorneys, grassroots organizers, and academic and professional institutions. The purpose is to educate and mobilize citizen youth and adults for the U.S. ratification of the CRC. The key to ratification is to bring together all segments of civil society in advocating on behalf of our nation's children (www.childrightscampaign.org).

EDUCATE Yourself about the CRC

Educate yourself and friends by reading information on the Convention and the current work of the National Movement to Mobilize Communities for Ratification. Many web sites will be suggested. There will be petitions to distribute and information on further involvements.

RAISE AWARENESS in your community

Talk to your family, friends, colleagues, and community members. Write letters and op.eds. to newspapers. Organize workshops, rallies, and other events.

BE A LEADER

Contact your local, state, and national politicians. Speak with them about the CRC.

Many faith-based organizations are supporting the Campaign for Ratification. Work with groups within those organizations.

MOBLIIZE/NETWORK

Identify and work with organizations that advocate on behalf of children. Help them set up a table with CRC materials and or petitions. Many of these education organizations have existing advocacy groups.

JOIN the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

On their website (www.childrightscampaign.org), there is a wealth of information about the organization, its purposes, materials on the CRC including a power point or PDF program on the CRC that can be used with children and adults. There will be petitions to distribute and information on further involvements.

7. What is at Stake?

All Our Children

Failure to ratify the CRC is a failure to stand up for all children and recognize their plight. Children cannot stand up for themselves. When children become adults, they will make decisions affecting all of us.

If all of us would act every day in favor of the Rights of the Child, it would help us improve conditions for children and promote a Culture of Peace for All.

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Cyberschoolbus on CRC:

Introduction, Full Text of the Convention; Kid-friendly; Impact of the Convention

Lesson plan [Introduction, LP, (coming – teacher notes)]; Multi-media essay

<http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/crc/>

UN Core treaties: CRC + 2 optional protocols on involvement of children in armed conflict & prostitution

<http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/treaties/childrens.asp>

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This is the new information from UNICEF that came today [March 28th]:

TeachUNICEF is the U.S. Fund for UNICEF's education program which empowers, engages and inspires young people to become global citizens. As active, global citizens youth today can play an important and lifelong role in the survival, protection, and development of children around the world. TeachUNICEF provides free standards-based resources (e.g. units, case studies, multimedia, data, and service learning tips) for U.S. educators to engage students in global affairs issues by learning about UNICEF and its partners' efforts on behalf of the world's most vulnerable children. Topics covered include water and sanitation, gender equality, poverty, armed conflict, and the Millennium Development Goals. To learn more and download resources visit www.teachunicef.org.

Hope this is helpful.

Looking forward to getting the DC hotel info. when you get a chance. Thanks in advance.